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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, DRL/ILCSR FOR SARAH MORGAN, G/TIP
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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR/ILAB FOR LEYLA STROTKAMP, RACHEL RIGBY,
AND TINA MCCARTER.

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SUBJECT: SYRIA - FORCED LABOR AND CHILD LABOR

REF: 09 STATE 131995

11. This cable provides information on child labor and forced labor in the Syrian Arab Republic per reftel.

12. Contacts at local international NGOs and children's rights activists reported the Syrian Arab Republic Government (SARG) kept no official statistics on the prevalence of child labor in the country, nor was there evidence the SARG regularly monitored industries for evidence of child labor. Notwithstanding some allegations in blogs, these same contacts do not consider the use of forced or child labor in the production of goods to be an appreciable phenomenon in Syria and have no statistics suggesting that it is. Anecdotal evidence suggests that (1) most child labor occurs among intensely poor Syrians and Iraqi refugees who seek to support themselves and/or their families by working in the service sector or on small farms; and (2) most forced labor occurs in the exploitation of foreign domestics living with Syrian families.

13. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs continued working with relevant NGOs and SARG ministries on a comprehensive children's rights law during the reporting period. Additionally, in December 2009, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor agreed to cooperate with the International Labor Organization and UNICEF on a three-month national study of the worst forms of child labor in the country.
HUNTER